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ABSTRACT

The Fond du Lac (Wisconsin) Experience Based Career Education (EBCE) Program was adopted and implemented to replace the traditional work experience program for senior year educable mentally handicapped (EMH) students at a public high school. The EBCE program had two major priorities--to create a set of learning experiences which were uniquely appropriate for each individual, and to put into practice the philosophy that the education process does not have to be a set of events separate from the world of work. Among the reasons for utilizing the EBCE program with mentally handicapped students were that there had been a relatively high dropout rate among the secondary EMH students and that EBCE offers a wide variety of career exploration sites throughout the community. Jobs ranged from highly technical and skilled to unskilled occupations. For each job there was detailed information including practical considerations (such as work location, hours) and a complete job description. Students were placed in a job for 1 to 4 weeks with an option to extend placement up to 13 weeks. Learning coordinators made site visits at least once every 2 weeks to monitor student progress. A special education learning coordinator worked with students at the learning center to design academic and career objectives which are detailed on written activity sheets. The Fond du Lac EBCE project was validated as a model project by the Joint Dissemination and Review Panel of the U.S. Office of Education. (SB)

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EXPERIENCE BASED CAREER EDUCATION

AND

THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENT

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EXPERIENCE BASED CAREER EDUCATION AND THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENT

By:
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I. General Overview of the Program

Fond du Lac's Experience Based Career Education Program is modeled on the plan developed by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, a regional educational laboratory located in Charleston, West Virginia, engaged in research and development for the United States Office of Education and the National Institute of Education. Fond du Lac received federal funding for the project in October, 1976, and implemented the program with 59 twelfth grade students from L. P. Goodrich High School in January, 1977.

Experience Based Career Education (EBCE) represents a comprehensive alternative to the regular high school program, offering individualized academic and vocational education experiences which earn high school elective credits that satisfy graduation requirements. In EBCE, the important words are "experience" and "career." When students gain experience in a variety of jobs, they are better able to decide what they realistically want to do and can do about selecting a career. EBCE emphasizes first-hand experiences in places where people are employed to produce goods and services. The students in the program are permitted to perform work tasks as well as observe adults in their work environment. Students explore various careers; they do not train for them. They are not paid for time spent doing hands-on activities at the job experience sites. Since the hands-on experiences are for the sole purpose of furthering a student's learning, they stop short of becoming commercially productive for the employer. At no time do EBCE students replace or prevent the employment of job-ready persons in the community's labor force.

The activities in the work place are organized jointly by the student and a learning coordinator to yield academic, career, interpersonal, and occupational skills. A variety of worksites and work related skills extend the opportunities for EBCE students to find out what they are and are not interested in considering as a possible career choice.

EBCE students (1) analyze the many different experience-sites available in the Fond du Lac community, (2) examine their own values, interests, and aptitudes, (3) choose the places and the jobs they want to investigate, and (4) spend from one to thirteen weeks at the job sites that they have selected.

Although EBCE students spend 70-80 percent of their time at job sites in the community, they simultaneously complete their academic activities and receive the same credits that they would have received had they remained in the traditional high school programs. Students in both EBCE and traditional programs deal with the academic disciplines of English, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics. However, EBCE students also see these basic concepts, values, and skills applied in the "real" work of the community's businesses.

Each week, students spend four days at community experience-sites of their choosing and one day at the EBCE learning center. During the time that they are on their job sites, the students observe, talk with, and become actively involved with employed adults in their normal working environment. Arrangements are made for a designated employee (known as the site's "resource person" or simply R.P.) to take a special interest in EBCE students by answering their questions, introducing them to other employees, familiarizing them with business-related materials and products, and supervising their hands-on experiences.

During the one day each week that the students are at the EBCE learning center, which is also the program headquarters, they have conferences with

their learning coordinators (L.C.'s). The learning coordinators help the students turn job experiences into academic experiences, and these into earned high school credits. This is accomplished by interdisciplinary projects and assignments with specific learning objectives tailored to each student's academic needs.

The Fond du Lac Experience Based Career Education Program has two major priorities: (1) to create a set of learning experiences which are uniquely appropriate for each individual and (2) to put into practice the philosophy that the educational process does not have to be a set of events separate from the world of work. Because these priorities exemplify the highly individualized nature of the program, EBCE is seen as an appropriate alternative to the traditional high school curriculum for the entire spectrum of personal abilities ranging from the gifted and talented to the mentally handicapped.

II. Inception of Special Education/EBCE

In January, 1979, the Fond du Lac Experience Based Career Education Program was adopted and implemented on a half-day basis by the Special Education Department to replace the traditional work experience program for the senior year educable mentally handicapped students at Goodrich High School. The students attended special education or mainstreamed courses in the mornings and explored a variety of careers through EBCE in the afternoons. In an effort to emphasize more career education, the Special Education Department completely revised its high school curriculum, adopting EBCE as the full-time senior year program for the 1979-80 school year.

III. Rationale for Adoption of the Program for EMH Students

Some of the reasons for utilizing the EBCE program with mentally handicapped individuals are as follows:

1. In Fond du Lac, EBCE already existed as a well-documented, highly successful program with the regular high school eleventh and twelfth grade students who elected to enroll in the project.
2. The EBCE director and staff were encouraging and positive in their attitudes towards extending the distribution of academic ability levels.
3. The community had accepted and was supportive of the program.
4. Knowledge of community employment opportunities is invaluable, since the majority of students (both EEN and non-EEN) attempt to find post-high school employment in the Fond du Lac area.
5. It is important that the community realize that the mentally handicapped possess valuable wo k skills and should be absorbed into the workforce.
6. There had been a relatively high drop-out rate among the secondary EMH students, at least in part due to their disenchantment with the academic nature of the curriculum.
7. It was noted that most EMH students did not actively plan for a career and were indecisive as to their interests, abilities, a and aptitudes.
8. EBCE offers a wide variety of career exploration sites throughout the community.
9. EBCE complies with the mandates of the Individual Educational Program (IEP) in that a student's program is completely designed to meet his/her needs.

IV. Staff and Student Preparation

Initially, the project director and learning coordinators participated in a week-long training workshop in Charleston, West Virginia, at the Appalachia Education Laboratory in order to implement the program according to the specific guidelines instituted by the lab. The junior and senior high school special education staff and other interested faculty members were trained during the 1978-79 school year by the EBCE training coordinator at the Fond du Lac project headquarters.

Students who elect to take Experience Based Career Education during their junior or senior year are in-serviced during a week of orientation. Students' ability levels, aptitudes, and interests are determined through a series of specialized tests and inventories. The twelfth grade educable mentally handicapped students not only participate in this orientation but have also been thoroughly evaluated during their junior year through an intensive series of tests, inventories, work samples, and work situations at the Vocational Assessment Center located on the Moraine Park Technical Institute campus in Fond du Lac. The subsequent extensive evaluation report gives the special education learning coordinator a true picture of the student's employability skills which in turn helps in realistic job site selection.

V. Student Population Served

At present, 71 high school juniors and seniors are enrolled in the EBCE program. Sixty non-EEN students (although this population has included learning disabled and emotionally disturbed students) are served by three learning coordinators with teaching degrees in varying academic areas. Therefore, the ratio is twenty students to one learning coordinator. Eleven EMH students are served by a learning coordinator with a background

in secondary special education for the mentally handicapped. It is felt that the number of students should be kept low so that adequate time can be devoted to individualizing the student's program.

VI. Job Site Selection and Placement

In the Fond du Lac area there are approximately 250 job sites from which a student can choose for exploration. These sites range from highly technical and skilled to unskilled occupations. For each site, there is detailed information, including practical considerations (i.e. work location, hours, specific regulations, etc.) and a complete job description. Students are required to read this information before making a site selection. EMH students are encouraged to consider their own personl abilities and aptitudes, as well as interests, thus making job site selections as realistic as possible. If the site is vacant, the resource person is contacted and the student is placed for one to four weeks with an option to extend placement up to thirteen weeks.

In order to monitor the progress of the student while on the job site, the learning coordinators make site visitations at least once every two weeks. If problems arise or if students are working on special projects, learning coordinators visit the sites more often. The EMH learning coordinator usually visits the students once per week to insure continuous progress and to offer suggestions to resource people and students. Each site visitation is documented (i.e. observations and suggestions) and filed.

VII. The Academic Component

As stated earlier, EBCE students are actively involved on their experience sites in the community four days a week. They are "in-house" at the learning center for one day a week on a staggered schedule, so that

the learning coordinator typically works with four students per day. The special education learning coordinator works with two or three students per day designing academic and career objectives to meet the needs of the individual. These objectives, along with the processes and materials by which they are to be met, are detailed on written "activity sheets." The learning projects designated by the activity sheets can be accomplished through a wide variety of methods (i.e. written research papers, tape recordings, art work, photographic presentations, demonstrations, manufacture of products, etc.). The activity sheets relate the academic areas of English, Math, Social Studies and Science to the particular career that the student is investigating. Specific job skills (i.e. filling out applications, interviewing, etc.) and work habits (i.e. punctuality, following directions, etc.) are continually stressed with all students in the program.

An example of an activity sheet would be as follows:

Objective: The student will investigate and report on the various careers in the motor vehicle repair industry according to the training needed, job duties, and pay.

Activities: 1) Make a list of 3 careers in the motor vehicle repair industry.

2) For each of these careers, find the following information:

a) the training needed for the job

b) the job duties

c) the pay

3) Do you think you would be suited to any of these careers now that you have studied them? Discuss this with your learning coordinator.

4) Use the following sources of information: (Your learning coordinator will show you how to use them.)

a) Dictionary of Occupational Titles

b) Encyclopedia of Careers

c) Occupational Outlook Handbook

d) Reading About Jobs

e) your resource person

Evaluation: based on a 1-2 page written report telling your findings. Neatness and spelling are important.

VIII. Evaluation

The activity sheets are evaluated on whether or not the objectives have been met and on the quality and quantity of the work presented. Points are awarded which lead to the acquisition of academic credit.

Students are also evaluated at each experience site. The resource person is requested to fill out an evaluation form which indicates the student's progress in attaining necessary work skills, habits, and attitudes.

IX. Benefits of EBCE

Experience Based Career Education offers many benefits to all participants whether they are college-bound or entering the work force upon graduation. It enables a student to see the relationship of academics to specific occupations and to actively plan for a career, rather than leave that important aspect of life to chance. The program allows for individual differences, yet encourages both handicapped and non-handicapped persons to work towards the same goal of career and self-awareness. Possibly the greatest benefit of EBCE is that it fosters a sense of responsibility to oneself and others.

X. Joint Dissemination Review Panel

The Fond du Lac Experience Based Career Education project has been given validation as a model project by the Joint Dissemination and Review Panel (JDRP) of the USOE. If you are interested in more information, contact Ron Nelson, 401 South Military Road, Fond du Lac, Wi. 54935, (414) 921-1937.